



Vinnies
good works

SOCIAL JUSTICE
NETWORK

Welcome to the Social Justice Newsletter for March 2021

New Vinnies NSW report reveals...

Inadequate income support payments create reliance on charities according to [a new report released by the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW](#) this morning. The report, which shows that the introduction of the coronavirus supplement corresponded with a 75% drop in calls for assistance, comes as the Federal Government looks to pass legislation that will see the JobSeeker rate drop back to less than \$44/day.

The report shows that calls for assistance have already begun climbing back up as the coronavirus supplement has been cut. From the end of this month, the supplement – currently \$150/fortnight – will be removed entirely, while the base rate will be permanently increased by \$25/week. This is less than half the amount recommended by the Henry Tax review more than a decade ago.

The report shows the extent to which people on JobSeeker need help from charities in order to make ends meet. They account for one in three people who ask the Society for help, and the most common thing they need is food. “If JobSeeker truly is aimed at helping people get back into the workforce, it needs to provide them with resources enough to cover the basics first,” Brooke Simmons, St Vincent de Paul Vice President – Social Justice, said.

The Society will continue to call on the Federal Government to increase JobSeeker above the poverty line, including through our support of the Raise the Rate campaign. If you’d like to get involved, you can join [a meeting for grassroots and community supporters on Wednesday 24 March, 1pm-2.30pm AEDT](#).

You can [download a copy of the report, which includes a data snapshot for each of the Society's ten Central Councils in NSW, here](#).

Next steps following the social housing debate

Last month, MPs from NSW Parliament came together to debate our 13,500 signature petition calling for more investment in social housing.

Members who watched the debate online, or who gathered in the Jubilee Room at Parliament House were disappointed that the Minister for Housing, the Hon. Melinda Pavey, did not take the opportunity to announce that her Government would invest in more social housing. But we were grateful for the words of support from our host, Alex Greenwich MP; roused by the impassioned speech by Jenny Leong MP; and heartened by the call for bipartisanship by Ryan Park MP. We were also encouraged that, following the debate, the Minister for Families & Communities, the Hon. Gareth Ward, urged us to continue to approach and engage our MPs about social housing.

With this in mind, members of the Society have begun writing to their MPs to ask that they make Private Members' Statements about the need for and value of investing in more social housing. This is a verbal statement given on the record, in Parliament, indicating an MP's support for an issue.

If you would like to join us in asking your MP to make a Private Members' Statement about social housing please contact us at social.justice@vinnies.org.au and we'll share an email template you can send to your MP. We'll continue our campaign for more social housing in the lead up to the NSW Budget in June and will keep you up to date with developments and opportunities.

Palm Sunday march

Every year on Palm Sunday, tens of thousands of people march in cities and towns across Australia to highlight the injustices experienced by refugees and people seeking asylum.

This year, Palm Sunday takes place on Sunday 28 March. In Sydney, advocates and supporters will come together from 2pm at Belmore Park, near Central Station, to call on our Federal Government to introduce more humane and compassionate policies to protect and support refugees and asylum seekers across Australia.

If you are interested in joining fellow St Vincent de Paul Society NSW members and supporters at the march please email us at social.justice@vinnies.org.au. For more information about the march please [click here](#).



Uluru Statement

Thank you to everyone who attended this month's webinar on a First Nations Voice to Parliament, run in partnership with the Indigenous Law Centre at UNSW.

It was a welcome opportunity to learn more about the process that led to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and the case for a Voice to Parliament enshrined in the constitution. We were grateful for the time and expertise of Associate Professor Sean Brennan, and Professor Gabrielle Appleby, both of whom were members of the pro bono legal team that supported the Regional Dialogues and First Nations Constitutional Convention that culminated in the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

In answering the Statement's invitation to walk 'in a movement of the Australian people for a better future', members, supporters and friends of the Society are encouraged to contribute to the Indigenous Voice co-design process, supporting the [Uluru Dialogue's key positions](#). You can also contact social.justice@vinnies.org.au for a template with further guidance and information.



Vinnies calls for continued support for tenants

In April last year, in response to the economic impact of COVID-19 and advocacy from the Tenants Union, the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW and other organisations, the NSW Government introduced a moratorium on evictions.

With this protection now nearing its end date, **earlier this month the Society urged the NSW Government to extend the moratorium, securing media coverage from [Macleay](#) to [Bega](#) and [Hawkesbury](#) to [Mudgee](#).**

Last week, the Minister for Better Regulation, the Hon. Kevin Anderson MP, announced a six-month transition period including limited protections against eviction for tenants with COVID-induced arrears.

During this period, tenants will be supported to enter a repayment plan for COVID-related arrears and can only be evicted if they fail to comply with this plan. However, it is not yet clear whether and how these protections will build on the provisions already available under the *Residential Tenancies Act*.

The Society has now joined a wide range of community and faith-based organisations including the Tenants Union, Mission Australia and Uniting NSW in co-signing an open letter welcoming Minister Anderson's announcement but questioning whether the transition plan will provide the protections necessary to adequately support low-income renters across NSW.

We'll provide more information on the proposed transition plan when available. You can click [here](#) and [here](#) to access our recent media releases or [email us](#) to read the open letter.



Vinnies submission on NSW property tax proposal

Vinnies NSW recently lodged a submission supporting the NSW Government proposal to give home buyers the choice to pay either stamp duty or an annual property tax.

As this change is introduced, a key design feature should be that low-income earners and other households experiencing disadvantage are protected against having to sell their home to pay property tax.

The transition from stamp duty to property tax is expected to place downward pressure on the long-term price of housing across NSW. Given our long running concern over the high price of housing across NSW, this would be a welcome outcome. The change would also provide Government with a smoother source of revenue that could better allow for planning and funding of social services and infrastructure, including social housing, to meet the needs of households experiencing disadvantage.

We agreed with NSW Treasury that existing home owners should be protected from paying property tax and that, as the new arrangements are introduced, would-be home owners should be able to choose whether to pay stamp duty or property tax. But to protect people who may experience difficulty paying an annual tax in future years, we recommended the introduction of a best practice hardship policy and noted we would welcome the opportunity to work with NSW Treasury to develop an appropriate framework.

We also indicated that tenants should be protected from rent increases and evictions including by legislating to remove 'no grounds' evictions. And we called for the introduction of an online calculator to support households with low financial literacy to make decisions that best serve their financial interests.

To read our submission, head to the [Vinnies NSW website](#).

The changing climate of our common home

As countries across the world embark on a journey of economic recovery following the pandemic, a growing number of voices are calling on governments to use this opportunity to ensure a more sustainable future, and decrease our dependence on fossil fuels.

Increasingly, climate change has become not just a distant threat, but something impacting people's lives and livelihoods here and now. In a new publication, [Rising Tides, Raising](#)

[Voices](#), the Inter-Congregational Voice on Climate Change (a group of 23 Catholic Religious congregations) seeks to bring the voices and experiences of people in Pacific Nations - many of whom face the imminent destruction of their homes - to the fore. Positing that religious and moral frameworks are critical in the fight against climate change, it calls on people to join the fight for our common earth and our common humanity.

With the islands of the Torres Strait among those at risk of irreversible damage, Torres Strait Islanders are also calling for stronger action from the Australian Government, and have taken their landmark case to the United Nation's Human Rights Committee. [You can support their petition here.](#)



Upcoming dates and events

Homelessness Prevention webinar

Institute of Global Homelessness

8am to 9.15am Friday 19 March

[More information](#)

Harmony Week

15-21 March 2021

[More information](#)

Palm Sunday March

2pm to 4pm Sunday 28 March

Belmore Park, near Central Station

[More information](#)

COVID-19: A lost opportunity to solve housing issues?

11am to 12:30pm Tuesday 30 March

[More information](#)

Do you know of a local social justice event or news item that you'd like everyone to know about?

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